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Empowering Female University Students: The Role of Women in Business Clubs

Summary:

In this study, the impact of membership of Women in Business (WiB) Student Clubs on empowerment of female university students is explored. In the first phase of the study, ten current members were interviewed to examine their experiences. The second phase is designed as a longitudinal study where the new members will be asked to fill out a total of three questionnaires (1) right after becoming a WiB member, (2) at the end of the first semester spent as a WiB member and (3) at the end of the second semester spent as a WiB member. The new members' progression in key variables such as career self- efficacy and attitudes toward women as managers will be analysed.

Track: Organisational Psychology

Career progression of women has been a critical topic in the studies of gender in organisations. Previous studies in this area have consistently shown that female employees suffer from several challenges and face discrimination starting from the beginning of their careers, throughout several phases such as selection, compensation, performance appraisal, and promotion (e.g., Barreto, Ryan and Schmitt, 2009; Bobbitt-Zeher 2011; Heilman and Eagly 2008). Research also showed that gender stereotypes prevalent in society and discrimination against women deteriorate the self-efficacy of female employees. Consequently, women in workforce accept that they cannot advance to top-level positions in organisations and avoid competing for such roles (e.g., Aycan 2004; Betz and Hackett 1981; Hackett and Betz 1981).

In the last decade, there has been a significant increase in the quantity and quality of efforts to increase awareness about barriers to female career advancement and to empower female employees. This trend is evident in global campaigns such as HeForShe, worldwide bestseller books such as *Lean In* by Sheryl Sandberg (2013), and numerous global and local organisations such as Professional Women's Network. Another extension of such activities is the establishment of Women in Business (WiB) student clubs at universities, with the aim of promoting the potential career advancement of female students even before they join the workforce also giving them a head start to minimise the mental barriers they force upon themselves. With this motivation, these clubs organise activities such as mentoring programs, career days, workshops, and seminars. Thereby they create opportunities for volunteering female employees in the middle- or top management positions to serve as role models for female university students. The present study is being conducted in collaboration with Turkish Women's International Network, (the organisation guiding WiB clubs at 20 universities across Turkey) with the purpose of examining the impact of WiB membership on development of female university students.

Phase 1 (completed)

The first phase of the study consisted of ten one-to-one semi-structured interviews with the present members (seven female and three male) of WiB Clubs at different universities in Turkey. The interviews lasted 25 minutes on average and were recorded with the permission of the participants. The first part of the questions focused on their personal histories and in the second part they were expected to respond to several questions focusing on their WiB-related expectations, perceptions, and experiences. Upon the completion of the interviews, they were transcribed and analysed by two independent researchers, relying on the principles of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). After the discussion of the themes defined by two researchers, key themes representing the motivation of and experience of WiB membership were defined as networking opportunities, development of female solidarity, and preparation for the challenges of business life.

Phase 2 (in progress)

Building on the findings of Phase 1, the primary purpose of this study is to monitor the career progression of female students who are expected to join the workforce in the near future. Theoretically, the study primarily relies on Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent, Brown and Hackett 2002), which states that self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals are the building blocks of career development. Thus, the impact of WiB membership on female students' career and job search self-efficacy, the strength and competitiveness of their career goals and outcome expectations will be studied. In addition, the progress of their attitudes toward women managers will also be monitored. A longitudinal research design will be employed with the purpose of tracking the study variables throughout the first year of female students as members of WiB Clubs. Depending on the attrition of participants across three phases, the data collection may be completed in a couple of years (Please see Table 1 for a summary of the research design).

Expected Outputs

The study is expected to have several short-term and long-term outputs. In the short term, the participants who complete all phases will receive personal development reports along with personalised suggestions to increase the contribution of WiB membership to their career development. In the long term, the results of the quantitative and qualitative studies will be combined with the purpose of analysing the impact of WiB membership on female students' empowerment. These results will also be compared across WiB clubs at different universities and club-specific as well as general guidelines and suggestions will be prepared for improving the content of the programs to maximise the benefits. The results and guidelines will also be shared with other WiB clubs and relevant organisations in different countries.

Expectations from the conference

The suggestions of other researchers attending the developmental paper session will be helpful for the improvement of the research design, since data collection for Phase 2 will begin after the conference, towards the end of September 2019.

Table 1

Research Design for Phase 2

	Questionnaire 1	Questionnaire 2	Questionnaire 3
Time	<i>Beginning of Semester 1 (after becoming a WiB member)</i>	<i>End of Semester 1</i>	<i>End of Semester 2</i>
Content	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Proactive personality (Bateman and Crant 1993) 2. Career decision making self efficacy (Betz et al. 1996) 3. Core self evaluations (Judge et al. 2003) 4. Trait anxiety (Spielberger et al. 1970) 5. Career futures inventory (Rottinghaus et al. 2005) 6. Attitudes towards women as managers (Aycan et al. 2012) 7. Sex role identity (Bem 1974) 8. Evaluation of expected difficulties in work life (based on the results of Phase 1) 9. Demographics 10. List of reasons for joining WiB Club 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Career decision making self efficacy (Betz et al. 1996) 2. Core self evaluations (Judge et al. 2003) 3. Career futures inventory (Rottinghaus et al. 2005) 4. Attitudes towards women as managers (Aycan et al. 2012) 5. Sex role identity (Bem 1974) 6. Evaluation of expected difficulties in work life (based on the results of Phase 1) 7. List and evaluation of WiB activities attended in Semester 1 (open-ended) 8. Overall evaluation of WiB experience (open-ended) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Career decision making self efficacy (Betz et al. 1996) 2. Core self evaluations (Judge et al. 2003) 3. Career futures inventory (Rottinghaus et al. 2005) 4. Attitudes towards women as managers (Aycan et al. 2012) 5. Sex role identity (Bem 1974) 6. Evaluation of expected difficulties in work life (based on the results of Phase 1) 7. List and evaluation of WiB activities attended in Semester 2 (open-ended) 8. Overall evaluation of WiB experience (open-ended)

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